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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, May, 1891.

THE BATTLE OF RONCESVALLES IN THE KARLAMAGNUS SAGA.

RUNZIVAL'S BARDAGI.

SAGA, in Old Norse, means a narration and, strictly speaking, should be confined to such prose works as bear in themselves the evidence of having been handed down by oral tradition for a certain period, before being committed to writing. In practical usage, however, the term Saga is applied to almost the entire body of the Old Norse prose-literature. It thus embraces equally historical works and works of the imagination.

The bloom of the Old Norse Saga was followed, as everywhere else in literary history, by an after-bloom less original, less vigorous. Expansion, imitation, invention played their parts here as everywhere, during the epigonic period. In the thirteenth century Iceland, the centre of the great Saga movement, declined rapidly from its position as a high-spirited self-governing state, toward that of vassalage to Norway. At the death of GUDMUND, bishop of Holar, in 1237, the metropolitan of Nidaros Norway appointed, by his own authority, Norwegians to both Icelandic sees, Skálholt and Holar. Henceforward neither folk nor clergy had any voice in the election of their bishops. The Norwegian kings meanwhile induced one and another island chieftain to become his vassals or to cede their lands, on condition of receiving them back upon a feudal tenure. Availing themselves then of the ecclesia to interfere in civil affairs and of their Icelandic vassals as emissaries, they stepped forward more openly. Finally in 1262-64 the Althings decision, that Iceland should become a tributary state of the Norwegian crown, secured universal ratification. The literary decline had, however, already set in and the loss of independence only served to accelerate the downward movement and prevent Iceland

¹ All (four) quarters of the country save the east-firths assented to union 1262; east-firths 1264.

from ever again assuming her former position, as the centre of Scandinavian art-life.

From the time especially of Hákon Hákonson (1204-63) down, Norwegian rulers took an active interest in contemporary literature. As a result, there appeared in the thirteenth century a number of transcriptions into Old Norse of the heroic tales of central and southern Europe. These translations naturally assumed in the north the form of epic expression native to that literature, i. e., the Saga, or prose story-telling form, rather than the metrical version.

The Karlamagnus Saga is the most important of the collections of prose-tales of the thirteenth century that Old Norse literature drew from Romance sources. It had apparently no prototype and consisted of a free paraphrasing and combining of such poems, having Charlemagne and his peers for their central figures, as fell under the notice of the compilers, or appeared to them and their royal patrons as worthy of being retold. Two versions of this Saga are extant, the elder dating probably from the first half of the thirteenth century, the younger from the close of the same century, or the beginning of the following. There is also a Danish version of the fifteenth century. Each of the Norse versions is represented by two MSS. designated respectively by UNGER as A.a. and B.b.

The younger version (B. b.) is based upon the elder, but differs from it in greater breadth of narrative, new incidents borrowed from other sources being inserted; in greater conciseness of statement; and in a modification of certain details, upon the authority of works unknown to the earlier transcriber.

Thus an entirely new episode, about Fru Olif and her son Landres, is given by B. and, while A. devotes sixty lines to describing Guinelun's appointment as ambassador to Marseille (strophes 244-313, ed. MÜLLER), B. gives only twelve lines thereto. Again, in the earlier version, Turpin perishes at Roncesvalles. The author of the younger version had at his hand the 'Speculum Historiale' of VINCENT DE BEAUVAIS, according to which Turpin took no part in the strife. Wherever,

therefore, Turpin is mentioned in A, B substitutes earl Walter. Sometimes, however, the younger recension is more correct and complete than the elder.

The younger text is preserved intact, the elder has many lacunae. UNGER's edition, from which we draw our translation, employs the elder text as basis, the younger for emendations. The Danish version of the fifteenth century was based upon an Old Norse original, corresponding to the elder text.

There are ten episodes or sections in the Saga, of which the eighth is devoted to the Battle of Roncesvalles.

TRANSLATION OF THE EIGHTH SECTION OF
THE KARLAMAGNUS SAGA.—THE BATTLE
OF RONCESVALLES.²

I.

After these things, Charlemagne made ready his expedition to Spain, as he had promised when he went to Jerusalem, and there went with him (the) twelve peers and all the best troops of his kingdom. King Charlemagne was for seven successive years in Spain and subdued all the country along the sea, so that there was neither wall nor castle that he had not overcome; nor district nor town save Saragosse, which stands on a mountain. There King Marsilius the heathen ruled, he who loved not God, but believed in Mahomet and Apollin, but they will betray him (1 to 9).

II.

It happened one day, that King Marsilius had gone under an olive tree into the shadow and seated himself upon a marble stone, and about him 100,000 men. He called his dukes and earls to him and said "Good Captains," "what sin has befallen us? King Charlemagne is come to destroy us and I know that he will join battle with us. But come ye and do so well, that ye counsel me, as wise men, and save me from shame and death, as it behooves you to do."

But no heathen answered him a word, save Blancandin of the castle Valsund. He was a

² Numerals after each chapter of text refer to corresponding verses in MÜLLER's edition of the 'Chanson de Roland,' 1878.

³ *Tân* has evidently here this sense.

very wise man, white haired and well-extolled for his knightly qualities and a giver of good counsel to his king.

He said to the king: "Fear not, send word to King Charlemagne the proud, a costly embassy and firm friendship. Give him lions, bears and large dogs and hawks, 700 camels and 1000 goshawks that have moulted, and 400 mules laden with gold and silver, and wagons laden with precious things, and so many besants must be there, that king Charlemagne can give thereof wages to all his knights. Now he has been here seven years continuously and it is time for him to go to France, there he lives in great ease. But thou shalt seek him there at Michaelmas, accept Christianity, become with good-will his man and hold all Spain (as feoff) from him. But if he will have hostages from us, then we will send him twenty or ten to confirm our friendship, one of thy sons and mine too, and it is better that they be slain than that we lose Spain and all our power and possessions, for it has now come to that pass." The heathen answered: "That is excellent counsel." Then said Blancandin: "If it be so done, I will wager my head that king Charlemagne will go to France with all his army, and every one of his men will go to his own home. King Charlemagne will be at Aix, his chapel, and make ready his feast. Time will pass by but king Charlemagne will not hear tidings from us, for we will not go thither; but king Charlemagne will be wroth on this account and cause his hostages to be slain, and it is better that they lose their lives than that we lose Spain the good. The heathen answered: "That is excellent counsel." And so their assembling ended (10-61).

III.

After these counsellings, Marsilius called to him his friends, those whom I will now name: Clarges of Balagued, Estomariz and Eudropiz his comrade, Priam, Greland, Batiel and his kinsman Mattheu, Joel and Mabriant and Blancandin, and he told Blancandin, their leader, to introduce that matter which the king will have presented to king Charlemagne. These were the ten most wicked and most guileful men of all his company. And then king Marsilius said to them: "Ye shall go on

my embassy to king Charlemagne, he is now encamped about the city of Acordies (Cordova). Ye shall bear in your hands olive branches—that betokens peace and meekness, and, if ye can bring about a peace between us, ye shall receive from me gold and silver, lands and garments. The heathen answered: "Thou hast spoken well, but we will do better." King Marsilius said: "Beg king Charlemagne to deal mercifully with me, and say to him, without a doubt I will become his man and go to meet him before this month passes, with 1000 of my best men, and accept the Christian law and comply with his will." Blancandin answered: "thou wilt get good therefrom." The king caused then ten white mules to be led forth; the bridles were of gold but the saddles of silver. And then every one of them mounted upon the back of his own mule and they went their way to king Charlemagne; and he cannot so be on his guard, that they will not deceive him somewhat (62-95).

IV.

The emperor Charlemagne had at this time won the city of Cordova and thrown down the walls and taken much property, gold and silver and costly garments, and there was no one in the city who was not either slain or made Christian. But that same day, when the ambassadors of king Marsilius came to meet king Charlemagne, he sat in a garden and diverted himself and his friends with him, Rollant and Olivier, Samson and Auxiens, and Hotun the strong and Baeringr, Nemes the good duke and Richard the earl, Guinelun, Engeler, and, where these were, there was a multitude of other men; there were 15000 Frenchmen and all sat under (upon?) costly stuffs to cool themselves and played chess, and some backgammon, both young and old, and the pieces were alternately of gold and pure silver, and similarly the squares on the board were alternately gilded and covered with white silver. Some rode forth for their diversion, some fenced. But the emperor Charlemagne sat under a tree in the shade. And thereafter the ambassadors of king Marsilius came thither and at once dismounted from their mules and went before king Charlemagne, where he sat. Blancandin spoke first and

greeted courteously king Charlemagne. "My lord, the king," he said, "may God watch over thee, he who created heaven and earth and was fastened to a cross, to loose us from hell's tortures; him should we serve, but no other. King Marsilius sent these words to thee, that he will come to meet thee and become a Christian, if thou wilt it. He will give thee gold and silver, according to thy desire; he will give thee lions and bears, dogs and fleet horses, that are much to be praised; 700 camels, 1000 goshawks, wagons laden with good treasures and costly garments, and 400 mules, charged with gold and silver; and thereof canst thou give wages to all thy guardsmen and knights. Thou hast been here now seven years, and it is time for thee to go back to France. Thither our king will seek thee and allow himself to be baptised and become thy man and hold all Spain (as feoff) from thee and be tributary to thee all the days of thy life." But when he had thus brought forward his message and ended his speech, the emperor Charlemagne answered his speech in this wise. "God be praised," he said, "that it is as thou sayest. If king Marsilius does as thou hast just reported, then I ask nothing further for myself." Then king Charlemagne bowed his head for a short time and thought thereon, but thereafter he held up his head, and he was very lordly of face, and was not hasty in speech. It was his custom to speak slowly. Then he answered thus the speech of the ambassadors. "Know ye," he said, "that Marsilius your king is my greatest possible enemy, how can I believe this that he will hold what ye have said to me?" Blancandin answered: "With my hostages we will confirm it from now till Michaelmas; then king Marsilius will come to thee and accept Christianity." Then spake king Charlemagne, "God can still save him, if he will do that." Now evening approached, and when the sun had set king Charlemagne caused the mules of the ambassadors to be led to the stall. Then tents were set up, and thereafter the messengers were led thither and twelve men appointed to serve them, and no kind of meat or drink was lacking. But when they had eaten, they went to their beds and slept until day-break (96-162).

V.

But, when night had passed, Charlemagne the emperor rose up at dawn and listened to the matins and mass and all the services, and then king Charlemagne called upon his noble men, for he wished to follow the counsel of the Frenchmen. And thereafter in the morning, when the emperor Charlemagne had seated himself at a table and upon his high seats and called to him his barons, the twelve peers came, those whom king Charlemagne loved much, and more than 1000 other Frenchmen came. Earl Guinelun was also there, who began the treason, and then they took counsel, but that ended ill, which was worse (or, as was to be expected, B.). Now when they were all together at this assembly, king Charlemagne began his speech in this wise: "Good captains," he said, "take counsel for me and for yourselves. King Marsilius sent hither his messengers, as ye know, and he offers me great wealth; many lions, good horses, 400 camels charged with gold from Arabia, and 100 mules. He will also give me 50 wagons laden with precious things, and he will come to meet me in France and will hold Spain (as a feoff) from me and be subject to me all his life long, and he will give me hostages (as a surety) that this shall be fulfilled; but I do not know what he has in mind." Charlemagne closed his speech. The French replied, "We must think over this." Then Rollant stood up and spoke thus: "Thou trustest without justification king Marsile. Seven years are now passed, since we came to his land, and I have endured many troubles in thy service. I conquered for thee the city of Nobilis and Morinde, Valterne and Pine, Balauigie, Rudile, Sibili, Port and Aulert, which stands on the borderland. But king Marsilius has often shown treachery and breach of faith toward thee. A short time ago he sent to thee twelve of his barons, in the same guise as he now sends, and every one of them had in his hand an olive-branch, and they bore such tidings as these reported yesterday evening, that their king would become a Christian; thou tookest then counsel with the Frenchmen, but they advised thee unwisely. Thou sentest then two of thy earls to king Marsilius, Basan and Basilies, and

he did like an evil traitor, and caused them to lose their lives.—"Continue thy warfare sire," said Rollant, "and go with all thy force to Saragucie; but thereafter let us besiege the city and desist not, until we capture it, and so avenge our men, those whom the traitor caused to be slain." The emperor Charlemagne bent his head and stroked his beard and moustache, and answered not a word. The Frenchmen then kept silence, all save earl Guinelun. He rose up and went before king Charlemagne and began: "Good emperor," he said, "thou must not trust the counsel of a foolish man, neither my counsel nor that of others, unless there be gain therein for thee. But since king Marsilius has sent thee word, that he will become a Christian and thy vassal, that man who refuses it, cares not what death we suffer. But it is not right that proud counsels should prevail,—let us abandon foolishness and accept hale counsels."—After these words of earl Guinelun, Nemes went before king Charlemagne, and there was no better man in all king Charlemagne's guard. He began: "King Charlemagne," said he, "hear the answer of earl Guinelun; it were exceeding well, if that which he has said should be performed. Now king Marsilius is overcome in his kingdom; thou hast won from him castles and cities, districts and towns, and subdued under thee wellnigh all his kingdom, and he is self-compassionate, when he begs for mercy, and that were great dishonor, if he should not serve to thy honor. Now thou must, for God's sake and thine own honor, show mercy to him; send to him now one of thy barons.—If he will insure thee with hostages, as he has declared, then that is well and it is wise that this host move not." Several Frenchmen answered: "Thou hast spoken well, duke" (163-243).

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MR. FLEAY ON NICHOLAS UDALL.

MR. F.G. FLEAY, in his invaluable but exasperating 'Chronicle History of the London Stage,' published last year, has expressed himself with a singular lack of clearness on the subject of